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SUBJECT: TARABA: APATHETIC STATE

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11. (U) Summary: Taraba State is a microcosm of Nigeria with over 50 different ethnic groups, great economic potential from agriculture, solid minerals, and tourism, but poor administrative management, epileptic infrastructures and age-long communal violence have militated against the progress of the state. Governor Jolly Nyame, a Methodist minister and the only civilian governor since the state was created in 1991, has many economic and social development dreams, but his administrations have done little but talk about them. He owes his continued election successes to his reputation as a peacemaker, and to more powerful political forces in the state canceling each other out on communal grounds. The longstanding armed conflict between Jukuns and Tivs in the south has abated in the past few months, but banditry and communal conflict still occur in many areas. End Summary.

DISORGANIZATION WRIT LARGE

12. (SBU) On January 13-16 PolCouns traveled to Taraba State in the northeast, one of the largest states in Nigeria and one of the most underdeveloped. Electricity is haphazard, and public water so scarce that residents rely on water vendors carrying jerricans for their daily consumption, even in the state capital Jalingo. An aide to Governor Nyame told us that he and other residents in Jalingo buy water without knowing its source, even though the nearby streams and wells where the water is drawn may be contaminated. Landline telephones are rare, and there are no mobile phone services. There are very few banks. At first impression, Taraba appears to be severed from the rest of Nigeria.

13. (SBU) Official business at the Government House was lackadaisical. Most of the state officials appeared incompetent in their jobs, and some did not even know the state very well. Several planned a day trip to one far corner of the state that the Governor wanted PolCouns to see, for example, only for the PolCouns' party to point out, comparing the plan to a map, that driving over 800 miles in eight hours through the mountains was impossible. As it turned out, none of the planners had ever been to those places, and none had looked at where they were on a map. Most Taraba state "experts" we met knew little about what was going on in their portfolios, and the only member of the Governor's cabinet who was reputed to be effective in any way, a medical doctor who has been Commissioner of Health, was recently booted upstairs from health to public relations. At least the clinics he had built across the state are still working.

ROADS, A PROBLEM ALL OVER NIGERIA

14. (SBU) Governor Nyame has a cabinet of 22 commissioners, many of whom have overlapping portfolios. A Commissioner of Works is supposed to build roads, but so is the Commissioner of Roads. An aide to Governor Nyame told PolCouns that Taraba has more political appointees than most states in Nigeria, and complained, "Apart from receiving fat salaries and wages, one wonders what they actually do." Apparently not build or repair roads; PolCouns' party transversed most of the state over three days, and the only road workers seen were local children filling in potholes by hand and asking passing motorists for handouts.

15. (U) Road maintenance is problematic across Nigeria, in part because the responsibility is divided between national, state and local governments that have very different planning systems. Local Government Areas get essentially patronage money from the states and have some revenues of their own, and the few local government-built roads seen in Taraba were in fair condition.

16. (U) State government gets most of its money in a form of

revenue sharing from the federal government, but is not sure how much it will receive when from the feds. As a result, only well-run state governments have the road contracts planned and ready when the money reaches the state till to pay for them. One aide to the Governor, Ibrahim Yarobo, pointed out that Nyame has not constructed even one road since the beginning of his second term in 1999. The state roads we traveled were in appalling condition; they were hard to drive at 40 mph, let alone the 100 mph the Taraba planners would have wished.

17. (U) National roads are maintained on a scheduled basis, with adjustments made to the schedule when there is major damage to the road, major funding not released by the Central Bank, or major influence is used in Abuja. Nyame's aide also said the Governor has not lobbied the feds to rehabilitate Taraba's one federal road, which spans the state. PolCouns' party drove the length of it one day, often reaching 60-70 mph for kilometers at a time before slowing down for the next few kilometers of potholes.

SO HOW WAS THIS GUY RE-ELECTED?

18. (SBU) It appears the administratively impaired Governor Nyame was re-elected in a mostly free and fair election in 2003, rather the opposite of the Governor in neighboring Gombe (reftel) who has done much better for his citizens but was probably rigged in. There appear to be two answers, both related to communal conflict that has wracked the state for several years. Governor Nyame is a Methodist minister, and has emphasized and succeeded at reducing those conflicts. Also, the war and enmity between Taraba's largest two tribes, the Tivs and Jukuns, in the more populous southern half of the state have canceled out their two candidates for governor, leaving the field to Nyame, a minority Mumuye from the northern town of Zing.

19. (SBU) The only practical zing Nyame has shown in office has been in mediation and the construction or rehabilitation of medical centers for most major towns of the State. Impractically, Nyame is full of ideas. The Governor lectured PolCouns on exploiting Taraba's mineral resources almost literally while the police were arresting the only miners at work in Taraba. They were illegals, in the sense that the GON makes registration of land titles and mineral rights (other than oil and gas) almost prohibitively difficult and expensive. The other project Nyame pressed on PolCouns for foreign investment was the construction of a huge dam and hydroelectric plant on the Mambilla Plateau. Nyame said that he needed 4 billion USD for the project, and that at 4,000 megawatts it would produce roughly as much electricity as Nigeria consumes. Nyame lamented that American companies had studied the project, but had not invested even after receiving feasibility studies and other necessary information.

110. (SBU) Nyame travels frequently outside the state to Abuja and abroad, supposedly in pursuit of foreign investment. Most Tarabans, including his staff, said he spends more time outside the state than inside. He reportedly was originally a close ally of VP Atiku, but now prefers Babangida. In 2000 he narrowly survived an impeachment attempt by the State Legislature during a bitter dispute over legislative finances and allowances. Nyame was first elected governor 1991-93, and worked for the Methodist Church before and after that. He received a Bachelor of Divinity from the Theological College, University of Jos, a Certificate in Administration from Emory University, and a Higher Diploma in Theology from University of Jos in 1980. Nyame was born in Zing on Christmas Day, 1955.

ON THE BRIGHT SIDE, MAJOR FIGHTING HAS SUBSIDED

111. (U) Nyame and leaders of various Taraba NGOs told PolCouns that the age-long triangular conflict between Jukuns and Tivs and between Jukuns and Kutebs has greatly subsided. Nyame said his background as a clergyman coupled with his childhood upbringing had helped him to broker a peace among the warring factions. His father was a medical assistant who welcomed and treated patients in villages from all segments of the society, regardless of tribe or religion. He mentioned that efforts were being made to address grievances, especially on land disputes. He had given the Tivs, long excluded from state government, one cabinet slot, and the Tivs' traditional ruler (the Tor Tiv in Benue State) made Nyame a chief in the tribe.

112. (U) The Taraba NGO leaders collectively agreed, in a meeting with PolCouns, that security was still a major concern in the State despite relative peace between Jukuns and their rivals. Periodic fighting among communities over land ownership, leadership tussles and ethnic domination was

common, and nomadic Fulani fought with farmers over land control. Other nomads wandering seasonally down from Chad added to both disputes and banditry, and they were the best armed. Two days before PolCouns arrived in Jalingo, a senior state official was attacked on the highway.

HIGH POINTS AND LOW POINTS

13. (U) There is much beauty in Taraba State, however, as well as untapped development potential. One example was the Highland Tea factory on the large and fertile Mambilla Plateau, about 4000 feet above sea level in the mountains about 6 hours from Jalingo by road. Present and past Nigerian presidents reportedly have farmhouses there, including Obasanjo and Babangida.

14. (U) With better marketing and distribution, Highland Tea could become a serious tea exporter. It already ships bulk tea through Chad and Niger to Sudan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, but it only has a 5 percent market share in Nigeria for its branded and packaged tea. The plantations and factory were established in the 1970s, the factory maintains a consciously chosen combination of old and new technology. They dropped mechanical picking machines for local workers picking by hand, to protect the tea bushes and to gain local favor. They dropped their old diesel electricity generators in favor of high-tech wood burning stoves for the critical drying/fermentation process. Its tasters (a rather technical skill in chemical balance as well as flavor, somewhat akin to winemaking) are trained in the UK, although the company believes training in the US would be better.

15. (SBU) Marketing is their weak point. Highland Tea staff said Lipton and other foreign brands sold in Nigeria are actually blended in Nigeria mostly or completely from Nigerian teas. Highland Tea is the only producer in Nigeria selling under its own brand. Governor Nyame hopes Nigerians and foreigners will make the tea popular. His apathetic state government does little to make that happen.

16. (SBU) Taraba State owns the two year-old Jalingo Motel, the only hotel for foreigners or middle-class Nigerians in the state. Its restaurants, however, do not serve the state's Highland Tea. They also do not serve any of the dishes on their menus, although Highland Tea is not advertised there either. Electricity (generated by the hotel) is turned on at 2:00am and turned off at 6:00 am. The cooks have gas stoves, but said they do not buy the foods necessary to make the dishes on their menu because nobody comes to Taraba to eat them. The hotel desk cheerily said management runs the generators on the schedule it does (when people are asleep) to save electricity. Like Taraba State as a whole, the Jalingo Motel could be appealing if it would just try a little.

ROBERTS